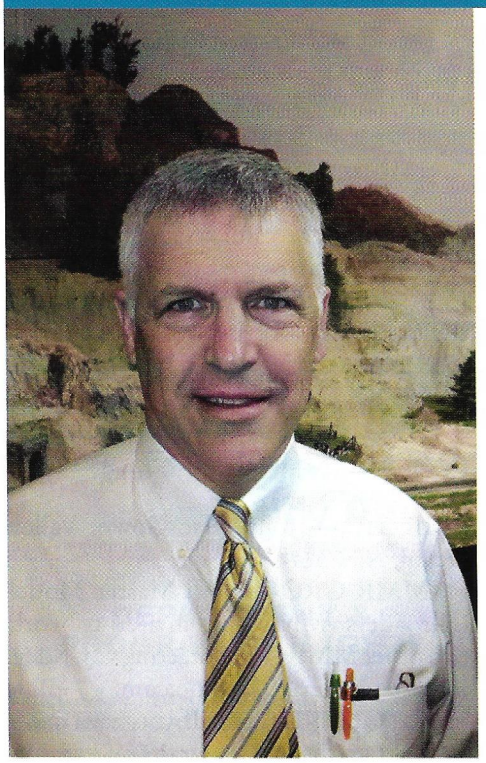

JOSEPH J. NICHOLS, JR., EARNS MMR #511

Every MMR can trace their path of model railroading and then the path to Master Model Railroader. I was born a model railroader, according to my parents and would sit in a swing in the doorway and watch my father work on his layout for hours. I knew the names, or at least my names, for most of his locomotives. By age nine, I was getting help from my father to build my own layout. Over the next few years, I added passing sidings and a roundhouse. Every birthday and Christmas offered an increasing roster. While one brother briefly had a small N scale layout and the other kitbashed numerous automobile models, neither one showed much interest in railroads. I attended the 1969 Miami NMRA National Convention and had my layout on tour, with my father's, for the 1973 Atlanta NMRA National Convention. My father earned his MMR 48, which was awarded at the 1973 convention. I made many friends during the convention.

The following year, my father and I, with his friend Bill Bryan, Jr. and his son, decided that we would attend the 1974 Seattle NMRA National Convention. The trip included a pilgrimage for the Bryans along their prototype, the Colorado Midland. However, in the valleys below the CMRR lay an intriguing sight. There were remains of a tiny, curvy, mostly washed out roadbed. I had never heard of narrow gauge. Needless to say to those who have fallen ill, by the time we returned to Atlanta, I was a narrow gauger.

My parents made numerous trips with me along the Denver, South Park & Pacific Railroad, and in 1980, I traveled with the most beautiful girl I have ever met, whom I married. We made several more trips, and my wife was right there reloading film and picking up rocks to match scenery. We had several moves during my training, resulting in moving small layouts. She tolerated the trains better than the old cars in the driveway that I had constantly taken apart.

We moved to Augusta, Georgia, for school, and we met Roy Tritt, who eventually earned MMR 235. Roy and I worked to build the CSRD Division and met many great modeling friends. Roy, Dad, and I attended many Region conventions together and became friends with the Southeastern Region's excellent modelers. Two daughters came along, and we dragged them back to Colorado. When my oldest daughter was ten, she and I took a ten-day vacation to Colorado, including the National Narrow Gauge Convention in Durango. We rode and hiked the abandoned railroad lines and took a memorable trip over Mosquito Pass (not recommended).

Every time I graduated from another school, I received a brass HOn3 locomotive. Over the years, I amassed an HOn3 empire and mini research library. I had every issue of the NG&SLG. I met Mal Ferrell, who could answer any question that I might ask and would always listen and help. When I moved back to Atlanta, I met Dick Hale, who became a great friend and generously gave me my father's old HOn3 rolling stock that he had bought from Dad years ago. Many National Narrow Gauge Conventions and many professional degrees later, I was back in Atlanta for good.

I became a Lifetime Member with my wife's approval. Mike Callahan, MMR, and my father tried to improve my modeling with some success, assisted by a new local modeler named Sam Swanson. I began entering most contests. I became active in the Piedmont Division. I soon became Vice President of the Southeastern Region and attended the BOT meeting in Phoenix followed by service as Region treasurer and contest chairman.

I began the Alpine Central Railroad, patterned after the DSP&PRR. Unfortunately, the ACRR is always in receivership as well. I converted to DCC and learned track-laying and scenery largely from my father. My wife can make great trees and rocks when she is in the mood and finishes all of the trim work around the layout.

The Achievement Program has unquestionably made me a better modeler, and I have learned things that I would have otherwise never tried. It took me 24 years from my first to my seventh AP Certificate. I plan to complete all the categories, and all are well underway.

I do not believe that I would have completed this work without the steady guidance and encouragement of my father. My best friends are in the SER/NMRA, especially in the Piedmont Division.

Joseph earned the following Certificates: Motive Power, Cars, Structures, Scenery, Civil, Volunteer, and Official as well as the Golden Spike Award.